United Nations A/72/717–S/2018/65

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.: General
25 January 2018

Original: English

General Assembly
Seventy-second session
Agenda items 28 (a) and 68 (a)

Advancement of women: advancement of women

Promotion and protection of the rights of children: promotion and protection of the rights of children

Security Council
Seventy-third year

Letter dated 22 December 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to submit to you herewith the report on the workshop entitled "Children and armed conflict and women and peace and security: leading to change — closing the implementation gap", convened by the Federal Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany on 20 and 21 April 2017 in Berlin (see annex). The report reflects the views of the workshop participants.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 28 (a) and 68 (a), and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Christoph **Heusgen**
Permanent Representative of the
Federal Republic of Germany to the United Nations

18-01217 (E) 060218

Please recycle

Annex to the letter dated 22 December 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Report on the workshop entitled "Children and armed conflict and women and peace and security: leading to change — closing the implementation gap"

Executive summary

1. On 20 and 21 April 2017, the German Foreign Office convened a workshop in Berlin focusing on the subject "Children and armed conflict and Women and peace and security: leading to change — closing the implementation gap". The workshop brought together members of the Security Council, members of the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict and the Group of Friends on Women and Peace and Security and staff of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academics, field practitioners and policy experts from the United Nations system and regional organizations (the African Union, the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)).

2. The workshop built on previous initiatives and provided a platform for the discussion of recent developments relating to the normative framework of the children and armed conflict agenda and the women and peace and security agenda and their ability to inform and mutually reinforce each other. It explored how regional organizations implement the agendas at the policy and field levels and how cooperation between the two can be further strengthened. One thematic session covered blind spots in international responses to sexual violence. Another session focused on the emerging issue of conflict-related sexual violence against men and boys.

3. The proliferation and complexity of conflicts that are marked by diminishing respect for human rights and international humanitarian law and accompanied by a lack of resources and shrinking space for civil society were identified as factors that posed challenges to the effective implementation of both agendas.

4. New concerns have arisen with regard to both agendas. In addition, a set of emerging issues that remain outside the conceptual frameworks of both agendas demand responses.

Child protection

5. The need to include communities in responses to child protection issues was emphasized. The specific vulnerability of adolescent girls was highlighted, as was the need to integrate age- and gender-specific responses to children. The importance of taking vulnerability and gender-inclusivity into account was highlighted. There was a consensus that the protection of children affected by armed conflict is a shared responsibility, to be strengthened in deeper partnerships with local, subregional, regional and international actors and organizations.

6. A key outcome centred on the need for increased cooperation and information-sharing between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations to ensure that child protection is considered in planning, policy and training. As an example, working in tandem with international child protection actors and the Government of Afghanistan, the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan has set in motion a system for documenting grave violations against children and bringing them to the attention of the Government in an effort to promote accountability. A broader cross-regional approach is also needed to better protect people on the move, and the

discourse needs to move beyond gender binaries to include the vulnerabilities of all at-risk populations.

Women and peace and security

7. Despite efforts and good intent, the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda remains patchy across all its core principles. Chronic underfunding, continued resistance to bringing women to the negotiating table and the inability to systematically implement the agenda in the operational strategies of national and regional organizations were identified as key deterrents to effective implementation.

Emerging issues and blind spots

8. The workshop identified blind spots in current United Nations programmes. First, there is a need to respond to the stigma faced by children who are born as a result of sexual violence in a conflict and to the violence faced by the children of refugees fleeing a conflict. Second, the issue of sexual violence against men and boys remains unaddressed within the current United Nations framework. This encourages impunity for sexual violence against men and leads to a lack of access to remedies and reparations for male survivors. Sexual violence is often conflated with violence against women and girls. The risk that male victims will remain invisible and left out of responses is significant unless their rights and concerns are given a specific focus. It was considered important that different forms of sexual violence be addressed. National laws need to take into account the broader dimensions of sexual violence and criminalize such violence against all victims, regardless of their sex. There was consensus that greater monitoring and reporting and more data are needed to close the implementation gap and that it is necessary to include the issue of sexual violence against men and boys in the architecture of the United Nations. It should also be addressed by the Security Council or the Human Rights Council.

Key recommendations

9. On the basis of discussions held during the two days of the workshop, the following key recommendations were developed:

(a) Better coordination of the women and peace and security agenda and the children and armed conflict agenda with regard to protection: (a) establish better synergies between the two agendas, for example, joint investigation plans and trend analysis; (b) ensure that the use of information on sexual violence is consistent between the reports on children and armed conflict and on women and peace and security; (c) improve strategic and day-to-day interaction between actors working on the women and peace and security agenda and those working on the children and armed conflict agenda at the policy level, but also in missions, when engaging with State and non-State actors, and improve training within United Nations missions on both agendas; (d) improve cooperation with local actors and with regional actors, namely, OSCE, the African Union, NATO and the European Union; and (e) improve responses to sexual exploitation, as that will have a direct impact on efforts to address sexual violence;

(b) Integrate components on women and peace and security and on children and armed conflict into peace processes: gender equality and children's rights and child protection provisions need to be core components of peace processes, and strong leadership is required. Women should be present at the negotiating table, and further strengthening of local women's leadership, such as through the African mediators network, should be supported. Women are actors in peace processes, not just victims in need of protection. Experts on the area of children and armed conflict should also be included in negotiation teams and their role expanded. Tools such as advisers on

women and peace and security and on children and armed conflict are required to more effectively operationalize mandates;

(c) Ensure justice for victims and accountability for perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law from all parties to conflict, including armed groups, as well as accountability for sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations and international staff;

(d) Raise the implementation of action plans on children and armed conflict in interactions with concerned Governments in political dialogues, démarches and cooperation programmes. Elements for implementation include the creation of child protection units in the military, the criminalization of the recruitment and use of children in national legislation and the establishment and implementation of age verification mechanisms in the military;

(e) Systematically integrate child protection into predeployment training and training missions as well as into military doctrine and operational planning and conduct;

(f) Ensure that regional and subregional organizations strengthen child protection through improved information-sharing and cooperation with existing United Nations mechanisms, and integrate child protection considerations into their policies, operational planning and personnel training;

(g) Ensure that budget cuts in peacekeeping and political operations do not have an impact on the effective fulfilment of mandates for the protection of children and women;

(h) The United Nations and regional organizations should integrate a gender perspective and child protection concerns into all phases and aspects of conflict prevention, early warning, analysis and planning, mediation, peacebuilding and the conduct and review of political and military operations and missions;

(i) The United Nations should increase the referencing of the women and peace and security agenda in the Security Council and integrate concerns relating to that agenda when considering crisis situations and emerging threats (include specific language related to women and peace and security issues in Security Council mandates, institutionalize briefings by civil society pursuant to Council resolution 2242 (2015) in New York and in field missions, mandate that all reports contain analysis regarding the differentiated impact of conflict on women, and incorporate women and peace and security elements into the terms of reference of commissions of inquiry and the designation criteria for sanctions regimes);

(j) Recognize and respond to blind spots such as children born as a result of rape, children of refugees, vulnerabilities due to sexual orientation and gender identity and, finally, the issue of sexual violence against men and boys;

(k) Put measures in place to serve children born as a result of rape by addressing their legal status and the social stigma against them;

(l) Consider creative ways to work with non-State actors on child protection and gender perspectives, including extremist groups by addressing legal obstacles and political and operational challenges;

(m) Examine ways to monitor and share information on and coordinate responses to the cross-border dimensions of trafficking in order to overcome the United Nations country-specific approach;

(n) Acknowledge and respond to the issue of sexual violence against boys and men in situations of armed conflict and displacement, through support for legislative, policy and programmatic change.

Detailed report on the individual sessions of the workshop

Old challenges — new opportunities? Updates on the status of the children and armed conflict agenda and the women and peace and security agenda

10. Discussions in the first workshop session centred on current concerns and initiatives relating to both the women and peace and security agenda and the children and armed conflict agenda, highlighting commonalities, such as their shared focus on protection, but also core differences, such as the aim within the women and peace and security agenda of enhancing women's agency in political processes. It was noted that, despite the robust framework set up by the Security Council, both agendas suffer from an implementation gap. A two-step approach to address that gap in both agendas was discussed:

(a) Broaden the focus from a thematic approach to include a geographical approach in which implementation is assessed and planned for on the basis of specific country results, for example the progress of the children and armed conflict agenda in Colombia or the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda in Yemen;

(b) Security Council members must work on these issues in a united manner. Participants highlighted the important role of civil society and local communities in implementing the agendas with regard to policy development, information-sharing, monitoring and advocacy, and pointed to the requirement for inter-agency cooperation.

Children and armed conflict

11. Participants concurred that the complexity and multiplicity of conflicts and the reactive nature of the Security Council's response has posed serious challenges to the implementation of the two agendas. The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic remains a key concern. In addition, new global challenges such as trafficking and the efforts by Governments to counter violent extremism have serious implications for the protection of children in armed conflicts.

Five areas were identified with respect to improving the implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda:

(a) *Action plan implementation*. Elements of action plan implementation need to be raised by Member States (and also by embassies in the respective countries), by the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict, which functions as an important forum for ensuring joint advocacy, and by regional organizations in their interactions with concerned Governments in their cooperation programmes, political dialogues or other démarches. This includes, but is not limited to, the creation of child protection units in the military, the criminalization of the recruitment and use of children in national legislation and the establishment and implementation of age verification procedures in the military;

(b) *Monitoring and reporting mechanism*. The effectiveness of the monitoring and reporting mechanism established under Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) should be upheld, in particular through the provision of sufficient human and financial resources to ensure the systematic gathering of accurate, timely and objective information on the six grave violations committed against children affected by armed conflict;

(c) *Peace processes*. Child protection provisions should be included in negotiations and in ceasefire and peace agreements. Experts on children and armed conflict should be included in negotiation teams and their role expanded;

(d) *Bilateral and regional military interventions*. Military deployments bring a wide range of child protection challenges to the fore. At the same time, they offer an opportunity for Member States and regional organizations to mainstream child protection into their military operations. Child protection should be systematically integrated into predeployment training (the Department of Peacekeeping Operations offers predeployment training to its troops; NATO provides online courses on children and armed conflict) and training missions led by Member States and regional organizations, as well as into military doctrine and operational planning and conduct;

(e) *Security Council mandates and reports*. Ensure that all Security Council mandates include specific language related to children and armed conflict issues and that reports contain analysis regarding the impact of conflict on children.

Women and peace and security

12. The involvement of women is known to have a discernible impact by lowering complaints of misconduct and the use of force and weapons. A statistic from 2016 from the Security Council showed that 88 per cent of Council reports contain some reference to women and peace and security and that there is a clear relationship between mandates, gender expertise and information and analysis. The sensitivity of the Council to women and peace and security has increased and, in specific countries, reference to the women and peace and security agenda has been made: in 2016, 56 per cent of crisis documents included a reference to women and peace and security, whereas in 2015 the figure was only 38 per cent.

13. It was stressed that women and peace and security concerns should be discussed in the consideration of crisis situations and emerging threats. The following recommendations were provided to increase the referencing of the women and peace and security agenda in the Security Council:

(a) Ensure that all Security Council mandates include specific language related to women and peace and security issues;

(b) Mandate that all reports contain analysis regarding the differentiated impact of conflict on women;

(c) Incorporate women and peace and security elements into the terms of reference of commissions of inquiry and the designation criteria for sanctions regimes;

(d) Institutionalize briefings by civil society pursuant to Council resolution 2242 (2015) in New York and in field missions;

(e) Ensure that all field missions fully incorporate women and peace and security components into their terms of reference;

(f) Call for justice and accountability for all perpetrators of grave human rights violations from all parties to a conflict and from armed groups, as well as accountability for sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations and international staff.

14. Participants drew attention to the issue of budgetary shortfalls in relation to women and peace and security: according to the figures presented, only 2 per cent of aid on peace and security is targeted at gender equality, and only a few of the 64 national action plans for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) have been allocated a budget.

Improving protection against sexual violence and addressing its impact

15. A presentation on Security Council resolution 2331 (2016), which prioritizes the fight against human trafficking for sexual exploitation, was the starting point for the second session, followed by the identification of trends and challenges regarding sexual violence in conflict, such as dealing with non-State actors, stigma and various groups of survivors.

16. Resolution 2331 (2016) responds to trafficking from the perspective of international criminal law and sexual violence from the perspective of humanitarian law. The resolution paves the way for more systematic monitoring and reporting, enhanced information-sharing and judicial cooperation.

17. It was noted that sexual violence and the trafficking and sale of women and girls were part of the strategic objectives and ideology of certain terrorist groups, including in situations such as those in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Resolution 2331 (2016) responded to that phenomenon and addressed the nexus between trafficking, sexual violence, terrorism and transnational organized crime, but the resolution still faces an implementation gap.

18. One challenge is how to deal with non-State actors. Among the parties listed in the Secretary-General's report of 2017 on conflict-related sexual violence, 11 of 46 parties are State actors; the rest are non-State actors. Given that commitments on addressing conflict-related sexual violence have been signed with many of the State actors, there is a need to focus more on engaging non-State actors and, in doing so, address the operational as well as political challenges that that entails, such as legitimacy.

19. Sexual violence against internally displaced persons and refugees is another challenge that needs a tailored response. The focus must be broadened in order to consider sexual violence not only in camp settings but at every stage of the displacement cycle: as a driver of displacement; during flight, when most incidents are reported; and in camps and urban settlements in which internally displaced persons and refugees seek refuge. It is, therefore, particularly important that all refugee-receiving countries adopt measures to mitigate the risk of sexual violence, to make services available to survivors and to provide them with the option of documenting their cases for future accountability processes. Furthermore, Member States are encouraged to recognize conflict-related sexual violence as a form of persecution that may serve as grounds for asylum or refugee status.

20. Subsequent presentations flagged the absence of data on internally displaced persons as a factor that inhibits comprehensive responses, since vulnerabilities exist at every stage of the displacement process. The lack of safe routes for those seeking asylum was also identified as an important contributor to trafficking and sexual violence, as refugees are forced to use illegal pathways. Displacement causes changes in social behaviours, which give rise to tensions and sexual violence.

21. An area that needs further attention is the situation of children born as a result of rape. In situations such as that in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as in current settings such as Iraq, consideration needs to be given to clarifying the legal status of undocumented refugee children, including children conceived as a result of rape, and the right of mothers to confer their nationality upon their children in line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. This is necessary to prevent possible statelessness. Since stigmatization is transferred from women to children, responses need to include not only women survivors, but also their families and children.

22. The above-mentioned report on conflict-related sexual violence takes a new look at the issue of stigma. The report underpins the debate, but stigma should be regarded as a persistent long-term problem that must be addressed. Stigma kills. The manifestation of stigma can lead to honour crimes, suicides (e.g., in the Middle East and North Africa region), unsafe abortions, economic exclusion and indigence. Stigma is handled as an immediate protection issue rather than a long-term issue. The Security Council could put an increased focus on this issue and could encourage Member States to move the stigma from the victim to the perpetrator. These dimensions need to be considered in responding to conflict-related sexual violence through programmatic interventions.

23. The following recommendations to prevent sexual violence and improve victim support were provided from the perspective of international humanitarian law and human rights law: (a) strengthen respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law in order to prevent displacement; (b) improve access for and engagement by humanitarian actors with regard to armed groups in order to encourage them to accept protection; (c) facilitate substantive engagement with victims to understand their views and needs; (d) remind Governments of their obligation to investigate sexual violence allegations; and (e) apply a do-no-harm approach when working with survivors and mainstream sexual violence risk prevention throughout programme implementation.

24. With regard to reparations, it was noted that further doctrinal development is not necessary, but practical delivery is. The United Nations has provided robust principles for the delivery of reparations and remedies in its Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law (2005), and the Secretary-General issued a guidance note specifically on delivering reparations for conflict-related sexual violence in 2014. The United Nations should work through entities such as the Land, Property and Reparations Division of the International Organization for Migration to deliver reparations to survivors. Donors should make reparations for victims a priority.

25. The discussion covered issues concerning the relevance of HIV to both female and male survivors and the duplication of trauma for sexual violence survivors who have had to live with HIV that was contracted through sexual violence. It was recognized that a broader cross-regional approach was needed to better protect people on the move. Finally, the discourse had to go beyond gender binaries in order to include the vulnerabilities of at-risk transgender populations. Another topic of discussion focused on accountability and justice as relevant tools for preventing sexual violence. However, there remain significant challenges in moving forward, owing primarily to the lack of capacity of expert groups to provide the right information to the sanctions committees. While a project has begun to profile perpetrators in order to obtain more information on the chain of command and territories of operation with regard to Security Council resolution 2331 (2016), that information can be linked to sanctions lists. The economic costs of sexual violence need to be highlighted to promote greater buy-in on the part of Governments. Overall, the information gap on sexual violence was discussed as an important barrier to the implementation of the protection agenda.

Mainstreaming the women and peace and security agenda and the children and armed conflict agenda at the policy level of the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, NATO and OSCE: lessons from the policy and field levels

26. The third and fourth sessions tackled strategies and experiences in implementing the agendas at the policy and field levels of the United Nations and regional

organizations such as the African Union, the European Union, NATO and OSCE, and participants discussed ways to strengthen cooperation.

27. Numerous OSCE decisions deal with trafficking in human beings, since that issue concerns all OSCE participating States. Protecting women in armed conflict, including by adopting national action plans for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), remains a priority for OSCE participating States. One thematic focus is the role of women in (countering) violent extremism. Strengthening partnerships at the international level through cooperation with the United Nations and with regional organizations on the ground is integrated into OSCE working methods. Field missions are extremely useful in supporting the monitoring of ceasefire agreements. However, a need to increase the focus on child protection in OSCE working areas and improve cooperation with other organizations at the national and international levels was identified.

28. Over the past few years, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations has strengthened the protection of children affected by armed conflict. In 2009, the Department issued a policy on the mainstreaming of the protection, rights and well-being of children affected by armed conflict within United Nations peacekeeping operations. The policy provided guidance on how to ensure that child protection concerns were mainstreamed at the strategic and operational levels of the work of peacekeeping operations. In 2017, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations issued an updated policy jointly with the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Field Support. The new policy on child protection in United Nations peace operations builds on the lessons learned since the launch of the 2009 policy. It provides guidance on critical child protection concerns, including the detention of children by peacekeepers and the treatment of children captured during military operations by national armed forces. It also prohibits the military use of schools, the use of child labour, and the sexual exploitation and abuse of children by United Nations peace operations personnel, all of which undermine the ability of peacekeepers and the United Nations to credibly and effectively protect children in conflict situations.

29. NATO has created the position of Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Women, Peace and Security and has developed policies and directives for both the women and peace and security agenda and the children and armed conflict agenda. With the recognition that contemporary warfare creates significant risks for children, NATO, in 2016, adopted a policy framework that includes standard operating procedures focused on training and education. The framework outlines a system of close cooperation with the United Nations. Afghanistan remains a key focus for NATO in the coming years, as the agency has deployed its first child protection adviser to the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan. For the Resolute Support Mission, the implementation of the NATO policy on children and armed conflict remains an ongoing priority. Progress has been demonstrated by the Government of Afghanistan in implementing the United Nations action plan and the related road map, through a presidential decree criminalizing underage recruitment by the Afghan National Security Forces, which entered into force in February 2015, and the endorsement of age assessment guidelines to prevent child recruitment. In partnership with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the Resolute Support Mission is supporting the Ministry of Defence of Afghanistan in developing a child protection policy that will provide, inter alia, clear guidance on handling cases of child recruitment within the ranks of the Afghan National Army and on the treatment of children recovered from non-State armed groups. The policy will also provide clear guidance on the military use of schools and provide the Government with operational tools to assist its implementation of obligations from the signing of the Safe Schools Declaration. After productive consultations with the United Nations, standard

operating procedure 307 was adopted by NATO. The procedure mandates the Resolute Support Mission to establish its own information-sharing mechanism on children and armed conflict. The mechanism will collect information on the six grave violations against children in armed conflict, in a similar way to the monitoring and reporting mechanism mandated under Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) and implemented by the United Nations country team. Information collected on incidents relating to children and armed conflict that qualify as gross violations of human rights is transmitted to the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defence for prosecution through the Attorney General's Office and through military courts, respectively. Those existing processes provide an opportunity to combine a reporting and information-sharing mechanism on children and armed conflict with a mechanism that enhances accountability.

30. The women and peace and security agenda and the children and armed conflict agenda are being prioritized and, as a result, play a crucial role in the European Union, although there is room for improvement in their implementation. The European Union acknowledges the women and peace and security agenda and the children and armed conflict agenda as two separate agendas that are interrelated in parts. Within the European Union, gender and human rights advisers are combined in posts, but there is increasing understanding that the two need to be bifurcated to improve implementation. While a clear recognition of children and armed conflict and gender/women and peace and security exists within the European Union and is backed by strong leadership commitment, that does not guarantee effective implementation. Effective structures, procedures and instruments need to be implemented, and it is essential to integrate a gender perspective, as well as child protection concerns, into all phases and aspects of organization, from conflict prevention, early warning, analysis and planning to mediation, peacebuilding and the conduct and review of operations and missions. Key challenges include ensuring that the content and substance of training are relevant and useful, mitigating the potential loss in institutional knowledge due to rapid staff turnover and the comprehensive implementation of the women and peace and security agenda, including issues concerning sexual exploitation and abuse.

31. The African Union has prioritized women and peace and security in a number of ways, including the adoption of several documents on women's rights since 2003 and the appointment of a special envoy for women and peace and security, whose mandate includes advocacy, bridging policy gaps, enhancing partnerships and building synergies within the African Union. As an example, the African Women Leaders Network focuses on transformative leadership and generates positive competition between countries. The African Union had also developed a strong framework for the protection of women and conducts campaigns against sexual violence in Nigeria and South Sudan. For the African Union, it is of crucial importance that women be more involved in peace processes, which can be accomplished by bringing together existing women's groups to express their voice and supporting strong women leaders. Weak support and funding of women's organizations remains a challenge for the African Union. Often, the ministries for women's affairs are the least funded. A participant noted that, while 19 African States have national action plans that include the role of women, none of them make any reference to the role of children.

32. Participants from NGOs presented and discussed their experiences of good practices but also of gaps and challenges in implementing the agendas in the field. The reintegration of girls formerly associated with armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was identified as a challenge, where assistance programmes do not adequately address community and family rejection and stigmatization. In Yemen, women still play a subordinate role in the peace and security process,

notwithstanding the fact that the country's current Constitution sets a 30 per cent quota for women's participation. Yemen does not have a national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), and laws in Yemen do not contain specific provisions to protect women from gender-based violence. It was also noted that the gender-based violence cluster is underfunded. Groups in Yemen recommend improvements in monitoring, judicial systems and access to information as steps towards increasing compliance with women and peace and security objectives.

33. During discussions, participants identified broader challenges to the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda and the children and armed conflict agenda, in particular, the lack of resources and growing political resistance, diminishing respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, and shrinking space for civil society.

Emerging topic: sexual and gender-based violence against boys and men in conflict

34. The introductory section of the session laid out how sexual and gender-based violence against boys and men is often a blind spot in international responses, owing to associated taboos. The scale of sexual violence against males in conflict remains unknown, since systematic or baseline data and trends in relation to locations, frequency and specific types of sexual violence against men and boys are not available. The dearth of systematic data and the absence of a coordinated response to sexual violence against males leads to impunity for such violence, a lack of access to remedies and reparations for male survivors, limited programmatic responses to male sexual violence survivors, and a lack of gender inclusivity in the global discourse on gender-based violence, resulting in little or no acknowledgement of male victimization, including on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity.

35. At the international level, the term "violence against women and girls" is well defined in United Nations resolutions, treaties, general comments and consensus documents. However, there has yet to be a United Nations human rights mechanism that explicitly condemns sexual violence against men and boys. Sexual violence responses also currently fail to address the needs of those who suffer violence because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

36. The data from a study on conflict-related sexual violence against males in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sri Lanka was presented. Issues common in both cases include a lack of documentation and reliable numbers; sexual violence against males in detention sites; a lack of effective protection for victims and witnesses; and a lack of dedicated experience and weak legal frameworks for responding to sexual violence against men.

37. One presentation stressed a link between sexual violence against men and boys and preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS. It was highlighted that sexual violence stems from abuse of power against vulnerable and defenceless populations, and addressing HIV/AIDS requires ending violence against all genders. The link between AIDS and sexual violence consists of four elements: physical, social, emotional and psychological damage. However, sexual violence against boys is still a blind spot. It is downplayed in modern HIV studies, overlooked in HIV funding proposals, omitted by the national strategic plans on HIV, excluded from service delivery and stigmatized by countries, since raped boys and men often do not talk about it. There is an assumption that males cannot be victims of sexual violence. Gender-based violence is currently defined as violence against women, which ignores male rape.

38. Health providers do not look for sexual trauma in males, as they are not trained to do so. It is simply not on their radar. Male victims often do not come forward,

owing to stigma and shame, among other things. Furthermore, laws are not inclusive. A more gender-sensitive approach is needed that works towards eliminating gender bias and providing treatment, community response and access to safe, non-traumatizing justice.

39. Five case studies, from Libya, the southern Sahara, the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq, Afghanistan and Greece, showed that sexual violence against men and boys was pervasive and was still a blind spot. While types of sexual and gender-based violence vary, they have a common root: the power differential between the perpetrator and the victim, irrespective of whether the victim is female or male. This involves rape as a weapon of war, rape as torture, sexual exploitation, the persecution of gay, transgender and intersex persons, sex trafficking, hazing in the military, sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers, and harmful traditional practices. The preamble and article 3 of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 provide for the protection of refugees without discrimination. That is particularly important today when young male refugees are endangered. For example, 97 per cent of unaccompanied and separate children arriving in Greece are males who often come from Pakistan and Afghanistan. These boys are vulnerable and at great risk of sexual violence.

40. The discussion brought to the fore increased attention on sexual violence against men and boys in situations of conflict, albeit with careful and strategic consideration. Some key steps include the sensitization of field missions to sexual violence against boys and men, bearing in mind that the gender-based violence sector is already the most chronically underfunded. It was also noted that the European Union has prioritized the issue of sexual violence against men and boys. There was consensus that greater monitoring and reporting and more data are needed to fill the implementation gap, and it is necessary to include the issue in the architecture of the United Nations, with the help of the Security Council, or in the Human Rights Council.